DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 392 029 CS 012 366

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TITLE Effecting Instructional Change: A Collaborative Approach.
PUB DATE [96]
NOTE 19p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College School Cooperation; Comparative Analysis; Elementary Education; *Instructional Innovation; Models; *Phonics; Reading Achievement; *Reading Instruction; Reading Research; Reading Skills
IDENTIFIERS *Alphabetic Phonics; *Cooperative Project for Educational Development; New Jersey

ABSTRACT

A study examined a collaborative project between a college and a New Jersey school district. The study was designed to facilitate change in reading instruction in a safe, non-intrusive manner. It used a collaborative model consisting of three sections: the beginning process, which included the choosing of director and co-director and formation of an administrative panel with agreed upon common goals, an action plan, and projected outcomes and services; communication, which clearly defined the roles of the panel and directors and their task assignments; and resources/ownership, which assured equitable division of task and funding responsibilities. The study group consisted of six children, experiencing problems in reading, who would be taught Alphabet Phonics, matched with 6 other children with reading problems who would receive traditional reading instruction. Two test batteries were used: (1) the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test (SDRT) and the Wide Range Achievement Test-Revised (WRAT-R), spelling only; and (2) the "Gray Oral Reading Test, Revised" (GORT-R) and the Slingerland Screening Tests for Identifying Children with Specific Language Disability. Results of the study on Alphabet Phonics indicated that the children receiving such instruction showed statistically significant reading comprehension gains. Findings suggest that such collaborative projects allow complex educational and intervention procedures and programs to be piloted in school systems for the purposes of informally assessing the efficacy of the intervention. (Contains 2 tables of data and 17 references.) (CR)

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ED 392 029

Effecting Instructional Change: A Collaborative Approach

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This article describes and analyzes a small collaborative project between a college and a local school district that was designed to facilitate instructional change in the area of reading in a safe, non-intrusive manner. Participants in the project adhered to a model of collaboration which proved to be quite successful. The reading method, a multisensory phonetic approach for teaching and developing reading, spelling, writing and language, was also found to successfully meet the needs of the children. In this case, collaboration was an effective means for change.

Change is difficult for most people, but it is particularly difficult for teachers. When considering a change in teaching methodology or material, there are many factors which must be considered, the most important of which is the welfare of the child. There is risk involved in choosing an approach that has not yet been proven to be effective, but too few pedagogical approaches have a sufficient research history to warrant confidence. Even if the new method or material does come with sufficient evidence of its effectiveness and is deemed appropriate for the child, it can be difficult for teachers to give up an old approach that has become familiar, is still interesting to teach, and "seems to work." How then do we encourage and facilitate change when we have decided that change is clearly needed? This article describes a small collaborative project between a college and a nearby public school that produced such change in a non-intrusive manner, giving the teachers the confidence and support they needed plus allowing them to develop a model for future collaborative projects.

Collaboration between colleges and schools is not as easy as it sounds. In fact, some professionals believe that it is impossible due to the fact that principles necessary for successful collaboration are often absent in both institutions (Lasley, 1991). Diverse needs of a college and a school district frequently pose significant problems. Other documented barriers to successful collaboration include interpersonal difficulties such as distrust of the college by the public schools (DeBevoise, 1986), problems with politics and personalities (Sarason, 1971), lack of

administrative support at both the college and public school levels, and inequities in the reward systems(Blumberg & Shablak, 1984; Instructor, 1986; Lampert, 1991).

The issue of control is yet another potential source of collaboration failure. Too often, when colleges and schools work together, the college staff does most of the planning and work and merely asks the teacher for consent and cooperation. This has been shown to be a poor approach since it has been found that teachers are more open to new ideas and alternatives when they are actively involved in the project. It has been clearly demonstrated that when control comes from above (administration) or from outside (college faculty), teachers exhibit more passive resistance to change (Richardson - Koehler, 1987). A true collaborative model, on the other hand, makes both teacher and professor equally involved, active and ranked (Hord, 1986; Smulyan, 1987-88). Again, easier said than done.

With the many problems that surround college-school collaborative projects clearly in mind, faculty from a state college and public school personnel from a New Jersey public school district attempted to find a way to jointly explore the efficacy of an alternative approach to the school's reading instructional problems as well as explore procedures for collaborative educational efforts that could serve as a model for others. Prior to the inception of this project, teachers from the public school district were discontent with the reading approaches they were using for both children at risk for reading failure in the regular

classroom and the more competent children in special education programs. The risks involved in selecting a new approach had prevented the teachers from making the desired changes until a collaborative, data collection method was proposed.

BACKGROUND and PROCEDURE

Collaborative Model

The collaborative model for this project, based on Hord's definition (1986), was chosen for the purpose of clear communication by providing a specific frame of reference. The model, as follows, is divided into three sections: the beginning process; communication; resources/ownership.

The Beginning Process

The administrative hierarchy necessary to effect change was identified at each institution and an administrative panel was formed. The college members included the Dean of the School of Education, the college Research Officer and the Chair of the college Academic Department. The school district members included the Board of Education, the Superintendent of schools and the school Principal. A college faculty member and a public school teacher served as co-directors and jointly design the project. From the written plan submitted to the administrative panel by the co-directors, the two institutions agreed on common goals, an action plan, and projected outcomes and services. This particular project was to be a two year study of the effectiveness of a multisensory language program to determine if any or all of the approach would be used by the teachers in the school. Six children

would be taught as a group and their progress monitored. Six other children would be chosen for a comparison group, monitored as well, but not exposed to the multisensory program. While the numbers were small, both institutions believed the groups would provide sufficient evidence for decision-making.

The two organizations - school and college - agreed to exchange tasks. The college offered a college professor, on a released time basis, to serve as the teacher, a complete multisensory language curriculum, and data-collection and analysis expertise. Release time was awarded to the professor as part of a college assigned research award. The school district offered to provide a co-teacher from the chosen public school, the physical setting, the children needed for comparisons, and the necessary communication support. The school district arranged to release the teacher from some assigned duties so as to afford time for this project.

Communication

The roles of the administrative panel and the co-directors were clearly defined. The primary roles of the Dean and the Superintendent were to give personal approval and consent to the project, to communicate the project design to others, and to obtain institutional approval and support. Progress reports were regularly submitted to this panel and prior approval was sought before any major changes were implemented. Critical to the success of the project was also a clear definition of roles for the college director and the school director. The roles had to be equal in

responsibility and importance. Inherent was a mutual respect for the other's background and talents, plus a genuine perception of their equality. Each was the spokesperson for the project at their respective institutions. The college professor assumed the role of teacher to the children, and the public school teacher who was serving as co-director assumed responsibility for tasks such as scheduling, adherence to school practices, communication with co-workers, interpretation of the project to school personnel, and pre and post testing.

The choice and consent of the directors was found to be dependent on such variables as personality compatibility, work habits, professional values, professional goals and some knowledge of the other's job responsibilities. It was agreed that when these variables are unknown, it is worth the initial time to communicate, align and possibly change directors before beginning.

Resources/Ownership

During the initial planning, the designated time for both faculty members to devote to this project was worked out equitably. As a result, no one person or institution "owned" the project. In regard to funding, a budget was approved prior to the start of the project, with each institution assuming specific costs. These costs were also divided equitably so no one institution was funding the project. Any expected expenses were shared by the separate funding sources.

Alphabetic Phonics

Alphabetic Phonics is an extension and elaboration of the

original Orton-Gillingham approach. In general, it can be characterized as a multisensory, phonetic approach to teaching reading, spelling, handwriting and language. Since it also works on structural analysis, listening, comprehension and verbal expression, it has been regarded as an integrated educational approach (Kuveke, 1989). Although Alphabetic Phonics was initially designed for dyslexic students, the teachers chose this approach for several reasons, including the following:

1. At the present time, it is being used for a variety of classified children who have learning problems, e.g., perceptually impaired, neurologically impaired, multiply handicapped as well as the developmentally disabled known as " at risk."

2. Alphabetic Phonics teaches children independent strategies that they can then transfer to the classroom, library or home setting.

3. The curriculum is not age-oriented or graded and is appropriate, therefore, with students of various ages and grade levels.

4. The method involves one hour of instruction per day. During this hour, the student is taught reading, handwriting, spelling and language skills. As such ,it is an efficient method and can be easily scheduled.

5. The curriculum is not restricted to specific vocabulary as are basal readers, and can, therefore, be more readily used with other subject matter.

6. Alphabetic Phonics is currently being researched more

intensively, and to date, the results are promising (Hutcheson, L., Selig, H. & Young, N., 1990; Ogden, S., Hindman, S. & Turner, S.D., 1989; ; Vickery, K., Reynolds, V. & Cochran, S., 1987).

In the Fall of the school year, a small pool of children experiencing problems in reading was identified by the Special Education Child Study Team and the teachers, and six were randomly chosen to be taught Alphabetic Phonics for two years. The group consisted of three second graders and three third graders. It was decided to follow a research model so that the public school teachers could learn some assessment and data collection procedures which might be used in other projects. In keeping with this, the six children chosen were then matched as closely as possible with children receiving traditional reading instruction on age, grade, sex and reading problem. All the children were enrolled in regular classes but were considered "at-risk." One child had just been formally labeled as Perceptually Impaired but retained her regular class placement.

Two test batteries were used:

1. The Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test (SDRT)and the Wide Range Achievement Test - Revised (WRAT-R)- spelling only.
2. The Gray Oral Reading Test, Revised (GORT-R)and the Slingerland Screening Tests for Identifying Children with Specific Language Disability.

The first battery, taken by all children, was used to compare the progress of the children in the Alphabetic Phonics teaching group with the matched children. Since the group was so small, only

minimal statistical analysis was appropriate, so gain scores were added for descriptive purposes. The second battery was administered to the teaching group only, in an effort to collect some descriptive information about their reading and learning characteristics. It was hoped that progress or lack of progress might be related to identifiable patterns.

The children in the teaching groups were taught Alphabetic Phonics four days per week by the college professor, a trained Alphabetic Phonics therapist. All the children were grouped together for the first year until the beginning material and learning strategies were mastered. During the second year, the third (now fourth) graders were divided into their own group since they began to move more quickly through the program.

RESULTS

Alphabetic Phonics

a) Reading-(SDRT)

A comparison of gain scores revealed that the second/third grade children in the teaching group made modest gains (3-5 months) over the matched children in auditory discrimination, phonetic analysis and word reading, but demonstrated a nine month gain in reading comprehension.

The third/fourth grade children in the teaching group demonstrated modest gains (7 months) in phonetic analysis but 2 year 6 month gains in auditory discrimination and a 1 year 1 month gain in reading comprehension.

When the progress of all the children in the teaching group

was compared to the matched children, a simple t-test analysis revealed that the reading comprehension gains for the children receiving Alphabetic Phonics were statistically significant (**See Tables 1 and 2**). Since the teachers believed that good reading comprehension is the goal of all reading approaches, these results were well received.

b) Spelling-(WRAT)

A comparison of the children's spelling performance revealed that the children in the teaching group gained an average of 14 points in their standard scores, while the matched children gained an average of 8 points.

c) Miscue Analyses-(GORT-R)

An analysis of the miscues demonstrated by the children in the teaching group prior to instruction revealed that the greatest number of errors fell into two categories; requests/ need for assistance and substitutions. Overall, the children gave little evidence of having word analysis skill. Upon conclusion of the project, all the children in the teaching group demonstrated word analysis skills as demonstrated on criterion-referenced miscue analysis materials.

d) Learning Characteristics- Slingerland

An analysis of the learning characteristics of the children in the teaching group revealed them to be most weak in the following:

1. Visual discrimination of words
2. the ability to recall and reproduce from memory, words, phrases and shapes

3. spelling
4. the ability to identify sounds in words.

Unfortunately, it was not possible to identify any specific relationships between learning characteristics and rate of growth. This was due, in part, to the small group size. Plans are made to continue similar data collection procedures in the future so that a larger data base will be available.

As a whole, Alphabetic Phonics was viewed by the faculty and administration as a successful intervention for children having reading problems. Teachers were particularly interested to discover that a phonetic approach to reading could have such a positive impact on the children's reading comprehension. As a result, the school district has supported teacher training in Alphabetic Phonics and has implemented on-going instruction in resource room settings.

In addition to the specific reading gains, another noted benefit was the fact that the children in the program shared their skills and techniques with their teachers and classmates. As a result, regular class teachers have also adopted some of the approaches and teaching strategies and incorporated them into their regular class curriculum.

Collaborative Model

In general,both institutions agreed that the collaborative model was very effective. Specifically,

A. it facilitated two years of cooperative work between two very

different types of institutions;

B. since information on institutional procedures was easily shared, different operational approaches could be merged successfully. Reporting mechanisms and styles to the respective faculties was one example;

C. frequent communication, as a result of close proximity , allowed the participants to identify the type of feedback and information that was most useful;

D. mutual trust was established about each institution's financial responsibilities and any 'unexpected' expenses were handled more easily;

E. the long-term aspect of this project, as well as its collaborative nature, permitted some experimentation with evaluation/assessment procedures until all were mutually satisfied;

F. the long-term nature of the project also permitted time for any misunderstandings to be resolved;

G. this collaborative approach allowed a degree of flexibility that is indisputably necessary in the context of a functioning school system while at the same time encouraging a research approach to future investigations;

H. it serves as a model to encourage other similar projects, as well as opening new lines of communications in different matters.

Problems identified were:

A. difficulty in engaging other school teachers in some of the Alphabetic Phonics techniques prior to the children, themselves, serving as emissaries;

B. difficulty convincing some administrators in both settings that approval and active support are not synonymous;

C. initial difficulties in convincing the school district that if the effort is to be truly collaborative they must award release time to one of their faculty members.

CONCLUSIONS

In addition to the positive aspects described above, collaborative, longitudinal projects allow complex educational/intervention procedures and programs to be piloted in school systems for the purposes of informally assessing the efficacy of the intervention. The mutual exchange of information allows an opportunity to ensure that the goals of the project are appropriate to the needs and setting of the school system. While there are very real problems to overcome for successful collaboration, particularly with projects of greater size, commitment and time seem to be two very essential factors.

A pilot project such as this one can also afford an opportunity for the college professor who has been out of the classroom to update his/her knowledge of children's developmental patterns and educational behaviors while giving the school district the opportunity to experiment with data collection procedures different research designs.

From a research perspective, a collaborative pilot project can help to determine if the situation is amenable to formal research prior to beginning, and if it is not, at least descriptive information, conscientiously collected, will be available to other

professionals to be used accordingly. This way the separate agendas of both higher education and public school districts can be addressed at the same time.

Table 1

ACADEMIC TESTING RESULTS

- Teaching group -

Comparisons of PreTest and PostTest Scores			
TEST NAMES	**Pre-test MEAN** SS	**Post-test MEAN** SS	**t score**
WRAT - Reading Subtest	68.9	73.2	.54
WRAT - Spelling Subtest	71.0	76.0	.68
Gray Oral- Comprehension	4.7	7.7	2.27*
Gray Oral -Passage	2.8	4.9	1.48

*significant at .05

Table 2

ACADEMIC TESTING RESULTS

- Matched group -

Comparisons of PreTest and PostTest Scores			
TEST NAMES	**Pre-test MEAN** SS	**Post-test MEAN** SS	**t score**
WRAT - Reading Subtest	77.25	74.25	.33
WRAT - Spelling Subtest	71.25	75.25	.47
Gray Oral- Comprehension	5.0	6.5	1.11
Gray Oral -Passage	3.25	5.88	1.56

*significant at .05

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